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S E C R E T BEIRUT 0506 COMBINED SECTION

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E.O. 12065: RDS-1 1/22/02 (BARRETT, ROBERT S) OR-M

TAGS: OREP (PERCY, CHARLES H) LE

SUBJ: SENATOR PERCY'S TRIP TO LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH
PRESIDENT SARKIS

1. (S-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: DURING AN HOUR LONG CONVERSATION ON JANUARY 20, PRESIDENT SARKIS EXPRESSED THE FOLLOWING VIEWS IN ANSWER TO QUESTIONS BY SENATOR PERCY. THE PRESENCE OF ARMED PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON IS A GREAT HINDRANCE TO THE EXERCISE OF THE STATE'S AUTHORITY. THE CREATION OF A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND OR ENTITY WOULD ENABLE THE LEBANESE TO DISARM THE PALESTINIANS WHO CHOSE TO REMAIN IN LEBANON. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN FOR AN ORDERLY DEPARTURE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB DETERRENT FORCE IS BEING IGNORED BY THE ARAB FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE. THERE IS A GREAT DESIRE NOW ON THE PART OF ALL LEBANESE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION BUT THE LEBANESE BY THEMSELVES CANNOT GIVE THIS FEELING CONCRETE

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EXPRESSION WITHOUT OUTSIDE HELP. A USG REACTIVATION OF THE MOU WITH ISRAEL, WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL ISRAELI CONCESSIONS, WOULD BE VERY BADLY SEEN IN THE AREA. THE LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN COULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES IF THE TWO MAIN CONTESTING PARTIES, THE SYRIANS AND THE PHALANGISTS, DO NOT COME TO AGREEMENT ON A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. THE USG MUST EVENTUALLY EXERCISE INFLUENCE ON BOTH THESE PARTIES TO PRESSURE THEM INTO REACHING SUCH AN AGREEMENT. PRESIDENT SARKIS WILL UNDER NO CONDITIONS AGREE TO RUN AGAIN OR EXTEND HIS MANDATE. END SUMMARY.

3. SENATOR PERCY, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR DILLON, DCM BARRETT, AND SFRS STAFFER BANNERMAN, CALLED ON PRESIDENT SARKIS, WHO WAS ATTENDED BY HIS CHIEF OF PROTOCOL, ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, AND HAD A ONE HOUR CONVERSATION.

4. THE SENATOR OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT HIS PRESENCE IN LEBANON SYMBOLIZED THE AMERICAN INTEREST IN LEBANON, THE AFFECTION AMERICANS HAVE FOR THIS COUNTRY, AND THE CONCERN THEY FEEL FOR IT IN ITS PRESENT PLIGHT. THE SENATOR DESCRIBED THE STERLING QUALITIES OF THE LEBANESE-AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF ILLINOIS, AND SAID THE MEMBERS OF THAT COMMUNITY LIKE ALL AMERICANS DESIRE PEACE AND STABILITY FOR LEBANON. THE SENATOR COMMENTED THAT IT WAS APPROPRIATE THAT HE HAD ENDED HIS FOURTEEN NATION TRIP THROUGH THE ARAB WORLD IN LEBANON AND HE ASKED FOR PRESIDENT SARKIS' IDEAS ON HOW THE USG COULD HELP, AND WHAT HE SHOULD REPORT TO PRESIDENT REAGAN, WHOSE ADMINISTRATION HAD A PRACTICAL AND REALISTIC ATTITUDE TOWARD EXTERNAL SITUATIONS.

5. PRESIDENT SARKIS, AFTER WELCOMING THE SENATOR, DESCRIBED LEBANON'S SUFFERINGS SINCE 1975 AND SAID THAT THE LEBANESE, WHATEVER THEIR SHARE OF GUILT FOR THE PRESENT SITUATION, HAD BEEN SUFFICIENTLY PUNISHED OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS. THEY HAD PAID THE PRICE OF THEIR MISTAKES AND IT WAS TIME FOR THEIR CALVARY TO END.

6. THE SENATOR TOLD SARKIS THAT HE WOULD BE GLAD TO HAVE THE PRESIDENT'S VIEWPOINT ON ALL ASPECTS OF THE

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PRESENT SITUATION. THE USG WANTS TO STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON (GOL) SO THAT IT COULD MAINTAIN ITSELF WITHOUT OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE. SENATOR PERCY SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD DETECTED A NOTE OF DISCOURAGEMENT AMONG ARAB LEADERS AT THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN THE LEBANESE SITUATION AND AT THE CONTINUATION OF THE SYRIAN PRESENCE. HE ASKED SARKIS IF HE THOUGHT THE SYRIANS HAD SPECIAL REASONS FOR WANTING TO STAY IN LEBANON.

7. SARKIS REPLIED THAT HE HAD TO SAY WITH REGRET THAT THE OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED THE GOL HAD NOT BEEN EFFECTIVE BECAUSE THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON ARE SO WELL ARMED AND NO ONE, NOT THE GOL OR OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS, NOR ANY OUTSIDE COUNTRY CAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT THIS.

8. ON THE SYRIAN QUESTION, SARKIS SAID THAT THE USG AT THE TIME KNEW BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE THE SYRIAN MOTIVATIONS FOR COMING INTO LEBANON IN 1976. THE GOL

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BELIEVES THAT THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES (LAF) COULD TAKE OVER THE MAINTENANCE OF SECURITY IN THE COUNTRY. BUT THE LEBANESE WORKING PAPER PROPOSING THIS TO THE ARAB FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE (AFC) HAD UNFORTUNATELY NOT BEEN SERIOUSLY STUDIED BY THE AFC MEMBERS. THE WORKING PAPER HAD DESCRIBED THE LEBANESE PEOPLE'S READINESS TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND THE LAF'S READINESS TO ENLARGE ITS ROLE, BUT THE AFC'S ATTENTION WAS ON OTHER MATTERS SUCH AS THE PHALANGIST RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL, COAST CONTROL, ETC.

9. SENATOR PERCY THEN DESCRIBED HIS INTEREST IN HAVING THE USG ESTABLISH A MORE INFLUENTIAL ROLE VIS-A-VIS THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WHICH WAS THE REASON HE HAD VISITED DAMASCUS. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE USG COULD EVENTUALLY PLAY A ROLE IN MARSHALLING PRESSURE ON THE SYRIANS TO LEAVE LEBANON. RIGHT NOW THE US DOES NOT HAVE THAT TYPE OF INFLUENCE ON THE SYRIANS AND THE LATTER COULD JUST REPLY TO ANY REQUEST THAT THEY LEAVE

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BY SAYING THAT THEIR DEPARTURE FROM LEBANON WOULD RESULT IN CHAOS. THE SENATOR ASKED SARKIS WHETHER HE HAD ANY DEADLINE IN MIND FOR A SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL.

10. SARKIS BEGAN HIS REPLY BY SAYING THAT THE GOL COULD NEVER SUFFICIENTLY REPEAT ITS APPRECIATION FOR THE ASSISTANCE WHICH HAS BEEN PROVIDED TO IT BY FRIENDLY COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE US. YET THE EXISTENCE OF SERIOUS OBSTACLES HAD PRECLUDED ANY FAVORABLE EVOLUTION OF THE SITUATION. THIS WAS THE CASE EVEN THOUGH, TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME SINCE THE ACCESSION TO INDEPENDENCE IN 1943, THERE IS A GENUINE FEELING AMONG ALL LEBANESE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE LEBANESE STATE AND A DESIRE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. HE HOPED THAT THE US COULD INFLUENCE THE SYRIANS AND THE PLO TO LET THE LEBANESE LIVE IN PEACE. THE LEBANESE HAD DONE ALL THEY COULD TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION. FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS KNEW BETTER THAN THE GOL WHAT THEY COULD DO TO HELP. THE PRESIDENT HOPED THAT VISITS SUCH AS THE SENATOR'S WOULD LEAD TO MORE EFFECTIVE ACTION ON THIS SCORE.

11. THE SENATOR REFERRED TO SARKIS' MENTION OF THE PLO TO SAY THAT IT WAS HIS OPINION THAT THERE COULD BE NO PEACE IN THE AREA UNTIL THE PALESTINIANS WERE GIVEN A HOMELAND OR TERRITORIAL ENTITY OF SOME SORT, AND THAT THE SITUATION IN LEBANON ALSO COULD NOT BE RESOLVED UNTIL THIS HAPPENED. IF THE PALESTINIANS HAD THIS ENTITY THE GOL COULD INVITE THEM TO LEAVE.

12. PRESIDENT SARKIS EMPHATICALLY EXPRESSED COMPLETE AGREEMENT WITH THIS VIEW. HE SAID THAT ALL FRIENDLY COUNTRIES SHOULD WORK TOWARD THE GOAL OF A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND "OUTSIDE LEBANON". THIS WOULD PERMIT THE DISARMAMENT OF THE PALESTINIANS WHO REMAINED IN LEBANON AFTER THE CREATION OF THE HOMELAND. THE GOL WOULD NOT FORCE OUT THOSE PALESTINIANS WHO CHOSE TO REMAIN IN LEBANON. THEY WOULD TREAT THEM AS ANY OTHER UNARMED FOREIGNERS WHO WISHED TO RESIDE IN LEBANON. THE GOL WOULD IN SOME CASES ENCOURAGE THEM TO LEAVE OR IN OTHERS REGULARIZE THEIR STATUS IN LEBANON. BUT THERE

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WOULD BE NO MORE PRETEXT FOR THEM TO BE ARMED AND THIS
WOULD NO LONGER BE ACCEPTED.

13. SENATOR PERCY THEN ASKED SARKIS WHETHER HE HAD EVER MET PRESIDENT REAGAN. WHEN SARKIS EXPRESSED THE REGRET THAT HE HAD NOT, THE SENATOR TOLD HIM HE HOPED THAT HE WOULD HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO SO, HOPEFULLY DURING PRESIDENT REAGAN'S CURRENT TERM OF OFFICE. IF SARKIS CAME TO WASHINGTON, SENATOR PERCY WOULD BE GLAD TO GIVE A LUNCHEON FOR HIM AT THE SENATE SO THAT HIS FELLOW SENATORS, ESPECIALLY THOSE ON THE SFRC, COULD HAVE THE BENEFITS OF HIS VIEWS REGARDING LEBANON'S TRAGEDY AND WHAT THE US COULD BE DOING ABOUT IT.

14. THE SENATOR AND THE PRESIDENT THEN DISCUSSED US-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE MOU MIGHT BE REVIVED, WITH ALL THAT THIS WOULD INVOLVE IN USG PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM ISRAEL AND INCREASED MILITARY LOANS AND GRANTS TO ISRAEL. PRESIDENT SARKIS GAVE IT AS HIS OPINION, WHICH THE SENATOR COULD PASS ON TO PRESIDENT REAGAN, THAT SUCH AN ACTION INITIATED BY THE US WOULD, IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY COUNTERVAILING CONCESSIONS ON ISRAEL'S PART, BE VERY BADLY PERCEIVED IN THE REGION. HE RECALLED THAT AFTER THE 1956 SUEZ CRISIS PRESIDENT EISENHOWER HAS SAID THAT, GIVEN THE CREATION OF ISRAEL AND US COMMITMENT TO IT, THERE WAS A LIMIT TO WHAT HE COULD DO IN FAVOR OF ARAB DESIRES. THE US HAD TRIED TO MAINTAIN A BALANCED STAND BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARABS SINCE THAT TIME BUT THIS BALANCE HAD BEEN LOST RECENTLY AND THE RESULTS COULD BE SUCH DRASTIC DEVELOPMENTS AS A SYRIAN-SOVIET STRATEGIC AGREEMENT AND THE DRIFT OF OTHER NATIONS TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. HE SAID A RETURN TO THE JOU WOULD BE VERY BADLY SEEN BY FRIENDLY ARAB GOVERNMENTS, AGGRAVATE PRESENT TENSIONS, STRENGTHEN THE REJECTION FRONT AND PROVIDE FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES WHICH COULD BE EXPLOITED BY THE SOVIETS.

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15. SENATOR PERCY THAN ASKED SARKIS WHAT INFLUENCE THE

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SYRIANS WOULD HAVE OVER THE 1982 LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. WOULD THEY BE ABLE TO EXERCISE A VETO?

16. SARKIS ANSWERED THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS COULD HAVE CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES. THE MAIN CONTESTING ELEMENTS WERE SHOWING THEMSELVES INCREASINGLY INTRANSIGENT INSTEAD OF TRYING TO REACH AGREEMENT ON A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY. ALL CONCERNED PARTIES, MOST OF ALL THE USG, SHOULD HELP IN THE ATTAINMENT OF SUCH AGREEMENT, FOR THE CHOICE WAS BETWEEN A WAR PRESIDENT AND A COMPROMISE PRESIDENT.

17. THE SENATOR THEN ASKED HOW THE USG COULD HELP, AND WHETHER THE PRESIDENT FAVORED A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD PERMIT HIM TO BE REELECTED OR HAVE HIS MANDATE PROLONGED.

18. SARKIS ANSWERED THE SECOND QUESTION FIRST. HE SAID HE HAD SERVED HIS TIME IN PURGATORY AND THAT THERE WAS NO WAY THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE. THEREFORE HE WAS AGAINST ANY CHANGE IN THE CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD PERMIT THE EXTENSION OF HIS RULE AND NO ONE SHOULD HOPE FOR THIS OR BASE THEIR ACTIONS ON SUCH A POSSIBILITY. HE SAID THAT WHILE HE HAD MADE NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE SUBJECT, HE HAD TOLD EVERYONE THE SAME THING AND THAT THE SENATOR COULD QUOTE HIM PUBLICLY IF HE WISHED. AS TO USG ACTION REGARDING THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, SARKIS SAID THE US COULD INFLUENCE THE ELECTIONS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY. THE DIRECT METHOD, WHICH WAS PREFERABLE, WOULD MEAN THE USG'S EXERTING PRESSURE ON THE MAIN PARTIES CONCERNED, THE PHALANGE AND SYRIA, TO REACH A COMPROMISE. THE INDIRECT METHOD WOULD INVOLVE USING THE INTERMEDIARY OF THE GULF STATES, WHO WOULD ACT IN THEIR TRADITIONAL WAYS (PRESUMABLY THE PRESIDENT MEANT THROUGH FINANCIAL INDUCEMENTS) WHICH HAD NOT PROVED VERY EFFECTIVE IN THE PAST. HOWEVER, SARKIS SAID IT WAS NOW A LITTLE TOO EARLY FOR AN ACTIVE US ROLE.

19. SARKIS THEN WENT BACK TO HIS REASONS FOR REFUSING TO RUN AGAIN. HE SAID THAT FOR HIS OWN PEACE OF MIND HE WANTED TO EXPLAIN HIS REASONING TO THE

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SENATOR. THE PRESIDENT THEN SAID THAT THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WOULD RESULT EITHER IN THE TWO CONTESTING PARTIES GOING TO WAR, OR IN THEIR RECHING AGREEMENT ON A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. IF THEY WANT TO WAR, THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT IT. IF THEY REACHED AGREEMENT THEN HE WAS NO LONGER NECESSARY.

20. SENATOR PERCY ASKED THE PRESIDENT WHETHER HE PERCEIVED ANY WIDELY HELD BELIEF THAT ISRAEL WAS HELPING IRAN IN ITS WAR AGAINST IRAQ AND THAT THIS WAS BEING DONE AT AMERICAN BEHEST. SARKIS REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT THINK THIS BELIEF WAS WIDELY HELD AT THIS TIME ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN TALK ABOUT AMERICAN AID TO IRAN AT THE TIME OF THE FINANCIAL SETTLEMENTS TO FREE THE HOSTAGES. FURTHERMORE, HE THOUGHT THAT THE IRAQIS HAD RECEIVED ASSURANCES ON THIS SUBJECT. IF SOME PEOPLE NOW BELIEVED THAT ISRAEL WAS HELPING IRAN IT WAS PROBABLY ASSUMED AS THE LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF ISRAELI-ARAB ENMITY.

21. THE SENATOR'S LAST QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE PRESIDENT THOUGHT SYRIA SINCERELY WANTED TO END THE IRAQ-IRAN WAR AND WHETHER IT COULD DO SO. SARKIS REPLIED THAT HE REALLY COULD NOT ANSWER THAT QUESTION. ONE OR MORE OF THE GULF STATES HAD REQUESTED PRESIDENT ASSAD OF SYRIA TO DO SOMETHING ALONG THESE LINES DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO THAT AREA. BUT THE IRANIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER HAD REPUTEDLY REJECTED ASSAD'S OVERTURES DURING A VISIT TO DAMASCUS.

22. THIS REPORT HAS NOT BEEN SEEN BY THE SENATOR.
DILLON

END OF MESSAGE

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